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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000357

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: GOB SHOWED RESTRAINT AT LABOR DAY DEMONSTRATION

REF: MINSK 347

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

11. (C) Despite inclement weather and heavy police presence, approximately 500 opposition activists gathered at Bangalore Square for a peaceful Labor Day rally and concert on May 1. Belarusian Party of Communists Head Kalyakin condemned the GOB efforts to suppress labor activists, including the use of short-term labor contracts, and Belarusian Labor Party Chair Bukhvostov read the crowd a resolution that called on the GOB to respect the rights of laborers and release all political prisoners. Before the rally, demonstrators attempted to gather at the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and march to Bangalore, but police prevented access to the NAS. Using loudspeakers and a heavy police presence, authorities made sure demonstrators stayed on the sidewalks and obeyed traffic rules as they marched from the NAS to Bangalore. Police briefly detained independent newspaper "Tovarishch" editor Voznyak on May 1 but released him in time to attend the rally. End summary.

No Access to the National Academy of Sciences

12. (C) On May 1, security forces prevented a crowd of approximately 100 demonstrators carrying communist flags and red and white (opposition) balloons from gathering at the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). The pro-opposition Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) applied for permission to walk from the NAS to Bangalore Square for the annual May 1 demonstration. However, on April 27 the GOB authorities granted permission for the demonstrators to gather at Karastayanava Street and march to Bangalore Square for a rally and a concert at Friendship Park. Since there was not enough time to advertise the new meeting place before the event, the BPC decided to try to meet at the NAS despite being denied permission.

Demonstrators March Through the Snow to Bangalore Square

13. (C) After several attempts by demonstrators to access the NAS, police encircled the demonstrators and forced them to begin the mile-long march during a late-spring snowstorm to Friendship Park at Bangalore Square. Police cars followed the crowd and uniformed police officers lined the sidewalk to prevent demonstrators, who were holding opposition red BPC, national white-red-white, and EU flags, from entering the street. Observing police officers noticed that although demonstrators were observing the traffic and pedestrian laws, it was the police's overwhelming presence that caused traffic

delays.

Opposition Party Representatives Briefly Detained

14. (C) BPC deputy Yelena Skrihan confirmed for Poloff, that on May 1 police briefly detained independent newspaper "Tovarishch" Editor Sergey Voznyak. On the way to the police station to verify his identity, however, the police received instructions via radio that they should return Voznyak to the rally at Bangalore Square. Independent media source Belapan reported that three other activists were also briefly detained near the NAS.

500 People Gather at Bangalore for Music and Speeches

15. (C) At the entrance to Friendship Park, a band playing festive music greeted the 100 marching demonstrators as they joined the assembled crowd that held signs reading "Lower Prices, Higher Wages" and "Free Medical Care" for a concert and a rally. A group of approximately 100 Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) activists carrying red and white BSDP rose flags arrived shortly before the speeches began, eventually bringing total attendance to around 500 people.

16. (C) In his address, BPC Head Sergey Kalyakin focused on the GOB's suppression of Belarusians' rights to association and to form trade unions. He condemned the GOB's short-term contract system as a "tool to enslave workers." BPC Deputy Head Valeriy Ukhlyanyev lamented that freedom of labor does not exist in the country. Belarusian Labor Party Chairman Aleksandr Bukhvostov read out the group's adopted resolution, which demanded that the GOB abolish the labor contract

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system, respect laborers' and trade unions' rights, annul the decree that limits sole entrepreneurs' ability to hire non-family member employees, release all political prisoners, and stop persecuting opposition activists. BSDP Acting Chair Anatoliy Levkovich, women's Party "Nadzeya" Head Yelena Yeskova, and Chernobyl Blast Aftermath Liquidators Leader Aleksandr Volchanin also addressed the crowd while anti-Lukashenko rock bands, calling for freedom in Belarus, performed at the rally.

Comment

17. (C) Despite the snow and obstacles, the small annual demonstration had a distinctly festive atmosphere and attracted a wide range of supporters. As with the April 26 Chernobyl March (reftel), the GOB appears to be showing restraint towards demonstrators, the heavy police presence and Voznyak's brief detention notwithstanding.
Stewart